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Tues 9:30-12:20 pm, HSH 303

### **Sociology 520: Qualitative Research Methods**

#### Course Themes and Goals

This course is designed to give you hands-on experience with qualitative research. If we are collectively successful, it will also give you a supportive structure from which to launch your own qualitative study. The seminar covers participant observation and in-depth interviewing. During this first semester, you will conduct and transcribe at least one audio-taped interview, take field notes based on your observations in a field site, write a research proposal, submit an IRB application, and launch your own empirical study. You will launch a study that includes participant observation and/or interviews. You will learn “by doing.”

This is the first of a two semester course; the first semester offers exposure to different traditions in the field, and you will begin your research project. The second semester will be dedicated to research immersion and continuity, and to writing a paper based on qualitative research methods. In the second semester, we will read several journal articles based on qualitative research, studying these for substance, use of evidence, and writing style and format. You should strive to shape your final spring semester paper into something resembling a carefully crafted 30 to 40 page journal article.

During the first semester of the course, you will read three recently published monographs based on qualitative methods. All of these books began as dissertations. I assigned these books because they are exemplary and indicative of the high quality research in qualitative sociology. But I also selected these books because they are researched and written by sociologists who precede you in graduate school by just a few years. Rather than feeling intimidation or despair (e.g., “How can I ever write a book like that?”), I hope you’ll find inspiration in these books. We will also read texts on “how to do” ethnographic field notes and interviewing, and we will read about debates having to do with issues of writing, power and representation, ethics and “public sociology” research oriented toward social change.

In the spring of 2014 you will continue with your original research, using observation and/or interview methods. During the spring semester, you’ll spend a good deal of time doing fieldwork, and we will discuss our ongoing research projects in a workshop format; We will continue to discuss and critique wide-ranging published work based on qualitative research, but we’ll include more journal articles, rather than books. For students in the PhD program in Sociology, this course is well-suited to help you complete the empirical paper requirement.

Finally, doing good qualitative research takes a lot of time. On some weeks, you might be spending 10-15 hours in the field and in transcribing, typing field notes and writing memos. There are no short cuts. Recently, someone shared an Amharic proverb from

Ethiopia with me, and I'm adopting it as my mantra: "Slowly, slowly, even an egg will walk." I want to see all of you craft qualitative research projects that grow legs and run, but for that outcome, you must be prepared to do a lot of work. Crafting a strong qualitative research project takes time, patience and dedication.

### Course Requirements

Students are required to attend class regularly, to participate in discussions of the assigned readings and our respective research efforts, and to come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that date. Each student must develop a qualitative research project that he or she can conduct here locally during this semester. You will also be engaged in following, reading about and giving feedback on the research projects of your classmates. Generosity is required. Every student in the class will take a turn leading discussion of the week's readings.

Writing requirements for this course:

- **A short research proposal** (3-4 pages) for a study based on qualitative research. A proposal will usually include a description of your project, a clear statement of the research question(s), a brief literature review describing where the project is situated in theoretical debates and previously conducted research, a description of the research (e.g., a description of who will be studied, how they will be recruited, where the study will occur and the data it will produce), a note on what you expect to find, and a discussion of the contribution of your project to the field. This is due at the beginning of class Oct 8 (a preliminary, one page draft is due Sept 3).
- **A completed and submitted IRB application.** For guidelines on how to prepare and submit IRB applications, which must now be submitted on-line, see IRB guidelines at [www.usc.edu/admin/provost/oprs/upirb](http://www.usc.edu/admin/provost/oprs/upirb). This must be submitted by Oct 8, at the latest. You must complete the CITI test by Sept 24.
- **An audio-recorded, transcribed interview** (related to your proposal), completed during the week of Oct 13-20. You will need to schedule in advance.
- **Fieldnotes** of an ethnographic participant-observation that you undertake in a public place, based on just one field site visit (ideally, this should be related to your proposal). This is due Sept 24. In addition, you will be writing on-going field notes and/or interview transcripts once you have IRB Human Subjects approval. The field notes should be detailed descriptions of your observations, and each set should also include a section on analytic reflections, with hunches and prospects for developing analysis, ideas about what you might focus on in the field next time, and feelings about your research relationships.
- **A 15 page reflexive report.** The paper should describe your emerging themes, major results thus far, and how you intend to develop the project in the spring semester. This paper should also include some critical reflections on the advantages and limitations of the methods you have used. Due by noon, Dec 13.

### About the Assignments

During each seminar meeting, the reading selections will be presented to the class by class members. These brief presentations should briefly summarize the material, and should focus on raising questions and identifying issues that warrant discussion. The presenter will help guide the discussion, and on the night before their presentation, she or he will email typed discussion questions to each class member. The date of each presentation will be assigned during the first class meeting. You can anticipate making two presentations over the course of the semester. Evaluation of class participation will include attendance and engagement, weekly discussion of major themes, reading presentations and providing feedback to peers when necessary.

The observation assignment requires that you go to an off-campus, public setting that you usually do not frequent. For this assignment, I would like you to be an observer, not a participant. This will allow you to focus on observing sights, sounds, gestures and social interactions, and to avoid dealing with issues of entering the setting, gaining access, trust and negotiating participant roles. The standard public settings include a busy public park or playground, a street fair, the airport, a bus depot, a shopping mall or a downtown swap meet, but you are certainly welcome to consider others—just discuss this in class beforehand. Describe and record everything you see and hear. Jot brief notes on the spot, and then use those telegraphic notes to type more complete field notes at the earliest opportunity, preferably that afternoon or that evening, or the next morning at the latest. Observe for an hour or two, and spend at least twice as long typing your field notes. In addition to your observational notes, include a paragraph or two that discusses theoretical issues and methodological issues. Two copies of these notes are due in class on **Sept 24** and on that day, you'll also discuss your observational experiences in class.

Another assignment that each student must complete is an audio-taped, transcribed interview. We'll go over guidelines, and read about how to prepare the interview guides in class. A draft of your interview guide questions are due in class on **October 15** and you will conduct your interview the week of **October 13-19** and immediately begin transcribing it. We will later discuss segments of your interview transcripts in class. Bring 2 copies of a 6 page segment of your interview, or recent field notes to class on **November 5**.

For your research project, I encourage you to focus on one setting, group or organization (it's just more manageable if you have some parameters). I prefer that you combine both participant-observation and in-depth, tape-recorded, transcribed interviews. You may, however, select one method if that seems more appropriate. We'll discuss your research interests and emergent proposals starting on the first day of class, and we'll continue discussing these throughout the semester. On **October 8** come to class with your completed proposal. All submitted work must be typed, double-spaced.

As soon as you receive IRB approval to conduct research human subjects (which should be by late October), you should count on allocating 6-8 hours minimum each week toward your research. Some weeks it might be twice that amount of time. *Be prepared to dedicate a good deal of time to traveling to your research site, spending time*

*in the field observing and/or conducting interviews, taking field notes, and to later typing up the verbatim interview transcripts and field notes.* Qualitative research is time consuming. There are no short cuts, and the more thought, time and thoroughness you put into your project, the better it will be. There will be obstacles and frustrations you cannot anticipate, but I hope you will feel passionately about your project, and that you'll find joy in the process. It's hard work, but it can be fun too.

### Professor's Pet Peeves

I'm sorry to start off with a list of rules, but past experiences dictate this. Cell phones off in class, please. If you will be absent from class, or must leave early or arrive late on a particular date, please let me know in advance and provide an explanation. If you are going to bring a laptop computer to take notes during seminar, please avoid surfing the net while seminar is in session. Also, please avoid walking out of the class when seminar is in session. We will collectively decide on a time for break, and maybe we'll decide to bring snacks to share during break.

### Evaluation

- 25% Reading Presentations, Class Participation, Feedback on peer work
- 15% Field Observation Assignment
- 15% Interview Guide & Transcription
- 20% Research Proposal and IRB Approval
- 25% Research Reflections Report

### Required Books

Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, eds, U of Chicago 1995.  
Contemporary Field Research, Emerson, editor. Waveland. 2001 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)  
Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research, Kvale and Brinkman. Sage 2009.  
Venice: A Contested Bohemia in Los Angeles, Andrew Deener, U Chicago Press 2012.  
Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives, Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez, UC Press 2005.  
Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys, Victor M. Rios, NYU Press 2011.

### Recommended Monographs:

The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession, Claudio E. Benzecry, U Chicago 2012.  
Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and Consumer Culture, Pugh, UC Press, 2009.  
On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters, Desmond, UChicago 2007.

### Key Journals to Consult

Qualitative Sociology in Doheny HM1. Q34, or  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/12r7881grq36/?p=469bee17b15f4141b3a6bda472ce604e&pi=0>  
Journal of Contemporary Ethnography in VKC HT101/U677;  
<http://jce.sagepub.com/archive/>  
Ethnography in Doheny; <http://eth.sagepub.com>

### Institutional Review Board

The USC Institutional Review Board oversees all USC research involving human subjects so that research does not violate ethical standards. Technically, interview and participant observation research conducted only for teaching purposes is not required to go through the USC IRB Human Subjects review. If data obtained from your project will be used for your dissertation or publications, however, your project must go through the required IRB review process. Many graduate students who take the second semester of the class will be intending to use the research for the empirical paper requirement in the Department of Sociology, and will probably present it at conference and ultimately publish an article or chapter based on the data. In fact, a publishable paper is a goal that all students enrolled in this class should strive to produce over the course of the two semesters. *Therefore, all students in this class must seek IRB approval for human subjects research during the fall semester.* We'll discuss this process in class, and a member of the IRB will visit our class and answer questions. You can begin the process by learning about the the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at <http://opr.usc.edu/upirb/>

### Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

#### **August 27: Introduction, overview of course; Researching human subjects; Discussion of your possible research questions and projects**

Read Venice for next week.

Assignment: This week, begin working on a draft of your research proposal. Come to class next week with 12 copies of a typed, one-page statement that includes the research question(s) you intend to pursue, the methods, and the site or groups you plan to study, and what you anticipate finding. Try to focus on questions that ask “how” and/or “why” rather than on relationships between variables.

#### **September 3: Reading Ethnography and Planning Your Own**

At this class session, we will discuss a recently published ethnography, and we will take time to briefly read and discuss the drafts of your research proposals.

\*Venice by Andrew Deener

\*Preliminary 1 page description of intended research due

#### **Sept 10: Competing Traditions in Qualitative Sociology; Writing Fieldnotes**

At this class session, I will provide a brief overview of competing traditions in qualitative sociology, and we will discuss the assigned readings listed below.

\*Pages 1-53 Contemporary Field Research (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

\*Preface, and Chapters 1-4 in Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes

Assignment for the next two weeks:

\*Take the CITI on-line test (should take 2-4 hours): <http://opr.usc.edu/education/citi/>

\*Conduct participant-observation fieldwork in a public site, and bring two copies of your notes on Sept 24.

**Sept 17: IRB**

Guest visit: Kristin Craun, USC IRB

\*Read “How To” info on [www.usc.edu/admin/provost/oprs](http://www.usc.edu/admin/provost/oprs) and before this class session, please complete the CITI (Human Subjects) on-line test.

Report on experiences with conducting observational field work and writing field notes

\*Bring 2 copies of your fieldnotes to class next week

**Sept 24 Interviews and Introduction to Coding**

\*Ch 4 in Interviews

\*2 copies of observational fieldnotes due; discussion of observation experience.

\*For next week, write some comments on your classmate’s field notes. This should include both jottings in the margins, and typed commentary.

**Sept 27 F:** Professor Jon Fox in Sociology Colloquium**Oct 1: Membership issues, characteristics of the researcher and the researched**

At this class session, we’ll review the readings below, and you will present feedback and reactions to one of your colleague’s fieldnotes (so come to class with commentary on one person’s fieldnotes). These comments might include questions of clarification, challenges to observations or interpretations, suggestions for more vivid detail and for reshifting focus to other people, interactions or processes in the field site.

\* “Appendix: Beyond Jungle Book Tropes” by Rios, Punished

\*”Methodological Considerations” by Gonzalez-Lopez, Erotic Journeys

\*Ch 6 by Baca Zinn, Ch 8 by Kondo, and Ch 9 by Warren in Contemporary Field Research.

Some Recommended Classics:

Eliot Liebow, Tally's Corner.

William Foote Whyte, Street Corner Society.

Herbert S. Gans, The Urban Villagers.

Ruth Horowitz, Honor and the American Dream.

Susan Krieger, The Mirror Dance

Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, Membership Roles in Field Research

**Oct 8: “How to write interview questions”**

\*Ch 1, 2, 6 in Interviews

\*Research Proposal due in class on 10/8, and Submit IRB proposal by 10/15

**Oct 15: Interviewing**

Come to class with 12 copies of 12-15 questions you will ask in your audio-recorded interview. Be sure to write your primary research question(s) at the top of the page. Discussion and feedback on your interview questions.

\*Ch 7,9 in Interviews

During the week of Oct 13-20, conduct one audio-taped interview. Begin transcribing.

**Oct 22: Interview Research**

\*Discussion of interview experiences, and book

\*Ch 1-5, and Appendix A in Erotic Journeys

\*"Boundary Lines: Labeling Sexual Harassment in Restaurants," Patti A. Giuffre and Christine L. Williams, *Gender & Society*, Vol 8, 1994:378-401.

**Oct 25 F:** Professor Christine Williams in Sociology Colloquium

**Oct 29: Extended Case Method vs. Grounded Theory**

\*Chapter 15, by Charmaz, in Contemporary Field Research

\*Reading by Burawoy, to be distributed

**Nov 5: Coding and organizing your fieldnotes and transcripts; Is participant observation or interviewing best?**

\*Chapters 5 & 6, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes

\*Chapter 11 in Interviews

\*Victor Rios, Punished

On this day, bring 2 copies of *either* 6 pages of your typed interview transcript, or 6 pages of typed fieldnotes that you have preliminarily coded. In addition, include also a one page memo on research findings and analysis thus far. You will then type two pages of feedback. Try to be constructive. Offer comments that will advance your colleague's project. You might ask questions or challenge observations or analysis, perhaps positing alternative interpretations. You might suggest different codes or new themes of interest to focus on in the field site. You will exchange feedback with a class member, and you will also give a copy to me.

**Nov 12: Workshop: Reviewing and refining our emergent coding schemes.**

At this session, you will be responsible for presenting the research of your classmate.

You'll explain the content of his or her fieldnotes or transcript segment, you'll discuss the coding scheme, and the developing analysis.

\*typed comments on your colleague's project due in class

**Nov 19: No Class**

**Nov 26: Writing**

On this day, students can elect to gather and read drafts of work in progress, or keep private writing time for the final paper. We will discuss these alternatives in early Nov.

**Dec 3: Summary and Open Discussion; Potluck party.**

Reflections on research experiences and writing dilemmas from seminar participants.

**Dec 13 Friday: Research Report Papers due** (please deliver a hard copy to my box in the Dept of Sociology, no later than noon).

**Have a great winter break!**

**I look forward to seeing some of you back for more researching in January.**

